

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

The Role of Transportation Disadvantage For Women on Community Supervision

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Summary/Conclusions

This study defines transportation disadvantage, documents its prevalence, and explores the problems it creates among justice-involved women. Bohmert conducted a study of 366 females on probation or parole and found that transportation was a concern for 42.6% of participants this coincides with other needs including health, safety, employment, neighborhood accessibility, and social support.

Limitations of Information

The research focused on substance involved female offenders in only one state (Michigan). Because the penalties regarding driving and garnering of licenses may vary from state to state, it is not generalizable to a national population. Michigan is not overly punitive in its driving laws, and therefore women in other states may experience a more challenging environment for driving after an offense. The study focuses on a very narrow sample. The results of transportation disadvantage may be different for a broad range of justice involved women (other than substance abuse), male offenders, and different states within the US.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Transportation is a Pressing Concern

The present study out of Michigan examines the role of transportation disadvantage in the lives of criminal justice involved women. Transportation disadvantage can be characterized as a lack of access to dependable, affordable, and reliable transportation. In order to conduct this study, Bohmert used a mixed method sequential exploratory analysis with 366 women to examine the extent and distribution of transportation disadvantage for women on probation and parole. Next, 75 women were selected from the larger sample to complete in-depth interviews about the types, intensity, and importance of the transportation problems that they encountered while on community supervision.

Three complex themes emerged from participants' experiences related to transportation: (1) disadvantage at the individual level, (2) reliance upon often unreliable personal support networks, and (3) community level needs. Analysis revealed that at the individual level, over half of the women in the sample did not have their own vehicle (68%) or a valid driver's license (58%). Further, several individuals noted physical health issues which limited the use of alternative forms of transportation such as walking or biking. In the follow-up interviews, transportation was the most common concern of justice involved women at 43%. Interviews discovered that poorer neighborhoods, lack of social and familial supports, as well as the intensity of the transportation needs were exacerbating transportation problems for the women.

Of the women interviewed, 49% reported at least one minor transportation problem, 39% reported one moderate transportation problem, and 29% reported severe problems. Transportation issues can make complying with conditions of community supervision difficult (e.g. attending probation appointments, treatment, and employment).

Practical Applications

- ✓ Consider asking probationers about their current transportation arrangements. Provide a list of affordable options for those who recognize transportation is a problem.
- ✓ Support probationers by helping them problem-solve transportation issues.
- ✓ Acknowledge that many probationers may be experiencing difficulties finding dependable transportation to and from their meetings.
- ✓ Collaborate with the probationer to find treatment, monitoring, and employment close to their home.
- ✓ Talk to probationers about who they can rely on for assistance in getting from one place to another. Help them to identify friends or family that they can turn to for assistance.
- ✓ Try to incorporate bus passes and tokens as an incentive for positive attitudes or good behavior. This can reinforce behavior while solving an existing problem.
- ✓ Use narratives to document important responsivity factors like transportation and health concerns.

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